



State Senator
**CONNIE
LAWSON**

Indiana State Senate
200 West Washington Street
Indianapolis, Indiana 46204

2003 Post-Session Newsletter

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State Senator
**CONNIE
LAWSON**

District 24

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Job-Creation Plan Successful in 2003

In the last hours of the 2003 legislative session, the Senate passed a budget bill that includes the most comprehensive economic development plan the state has implemented in 20 years. I voted for this initiative in an effort to create Hoosier jobs now, not just 10 years down the road.

The Senate JOBS Plan was amended into House Bill 1001 to stimulate growth in our state's sagging economy. The legislation focuses on a number of industries, such as high-tech fields and life sciences, while providing mechanisms to spark development in distressed counties. The budget and economic development plan passed the Senate 34 to 16 and passed the House of Representatives 61 to 37.

The 21st Century Research and Technology Fund will receive \$37.5 million per year over the next two years, which reinstates the funding removed by the governor last spring. An allocation of \$4.5 million will help finance the construction and operation of technology centers across the state. Universities will play a significant role in molding our economic future;

state of the art research facilities will attract high-quality faculty and outstanding students. Our plan has targeted five such facilities.

The JOBS Plan addresses the needs of small communities with our rural economic development package. We have provided incentives for industrial development in distressed counties by offering state tax forgiveness to new businesses that locate in those areas. The program would work similarly to the sports development authority that encourages professional sports facilities to be constructed in a certain location. If government can work to attract sports teams, it can certainly work to create new jobs in struggling areas of our state.

**The JOBS
Plan will create
a healthy
economic climate
to attract
employers
to Indiana.**

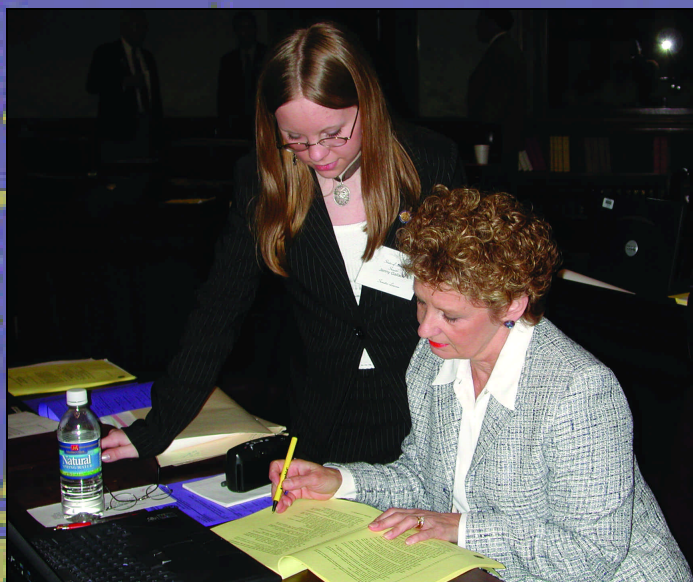
The plan strives to produce job creation and sustained
see JOBS, page three

Amending the Indiana Constitution

- Changes to the state's constitution must be approved by two separately elected, consecutive Indiana General Assemblies.
- If both assemblies agree, the change would be voted upon in the next general election.
- If a majority of voters approve the changes, the amendment becomes part of the constitution.

3 Proposed Constitutional Amendments on the November 2004 Ballot:

- The establishment of a line of succession in case the governor and lieutenant governor cannot fulfill their duties and the General Assembly cannot meet to choose a new leader.
- The elimination of the constitutional requirement that businesses be taxed on inventory.
- Permission for the General Assembly to set the dates for beginning terms of county officers, such as clerk and sheriff, for a uniform schedule of starting dates across the state. Currently, some county officials must wait up to 18 months to take office after being elected.



ALL IN A DAY'S WORK: Senator Lawson reviews bills with Jennie Gallatin, an 8th grader from Brownsburg Junior High School, on the Senate floor. Gallatin was taking a day from school to "shadow" Senator Lawson to learn about the legislative process.

Research legislation
on the General Assembly's
Internet web site at
www.in.gov/legislative.

Click on the link to
"Bills and Resolutions,"
then type in the bill number
or search by topic.

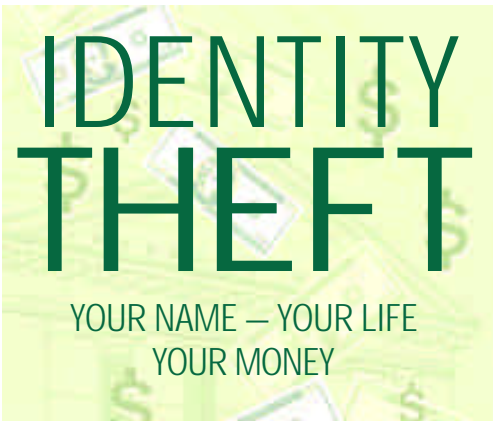
Lawson's Bill Creates Committee on Neglected Children

There were several measures considered this legislative session designed to protect our greatest resource: children. Recently, there have been countless stories of children falling victim to abuse or neglect by their parents, guardians, caregivers or teachers - the very people who are supposed to love and care for them.

As lawmakers, we strive to do all that we can to help prevent such instances from occurring within our state, and to ensure that when these atrocities do hap-

pen, the offenders are adequately punished.

Senate Enrolled Act 62 will establish a Commission on Abused and Neglected Children and their Families. The commission's task is to develop a plan of services for children who are victims of abuse or neglect or at risk of abuse or neglect. It is my hope that this plan will curb the instances of abused or neglected children within our state and raise awareness that these problems indeed exist.



Identity theft is quickly becoming the most prevalent and costly crime in the nation. Researchers estimate that criminals steal more than 600,000 victims' identities each year, costing consumers and the financial industry billions of dollars. Locally, more than 1,100 Hoosiers were victims in 2001, but the number could be much higher because many people have no idea their identities have been stolen.

The governor recently signed into law Senate Bill 320, which strengthens Indiana's law on identity theft. SB 320 ensures that an individual's address, telephone number, place of employment, employer identification number and mother's maiden name are considered identifying information and protected under Indiana's existing identity theft law. The bill also makes identity theft a

PROTECT YOURSELF

The following are tips on how you may reduce the chances of identity theft in your everyday life:

- Never provide any personal, bank account or credit card information to anyone who contacts you through a telephone solicitation.
- Destroy all ATM and bank receipts, old insurance forms, bank checks, expired credit cards, pre-approved credit offers and any other papers that include personal information, identification and account numbers.
- Check all credit cards and bank statements for accuracy.

Class D felony, punishable by up to three years in prison, regardless of the criminal intent. Current law states that identity theft is a Class D felony only if prosecutors can prove the thief intended to harm the victim. The bill also includes provisions to help victims untangle the damage incurred on their credit history by an identity thief.

The new law provides Hoosiers some added security if they should fall victim to identity theft; however, there are many ways that you can protect yourself and safeguard your personal information. (See information below.)

Often, consumers are not aware that their identities have been stolen and how it may affect their lives. Each of us has the opportunity to protect our information by being cautious. If you have questions or would like more information, please contact the Consumer Protection Division in the Indiana Attorney General's office, toll-free, at 1-800-382-5516 or visit the Attorney General's web site at www.in.gov/attorneygeneral.

Identity theft is a growing concern for all Hoosiers, but by safeguarding our individual information and strengthening our identity theft law, Indiana will be sending a clear message that these types of crimes will not be tolerated.

- Use only secure web sites when making purchases on the Internet.
- Do not put checks in the mail from your home mailbox. Drop them off at a U.S. Mailbox or the U.S. Post Office. Mail theft is common, and it is easy to change the name of the recipient on the check with an acid wash.
- Cancel all credit cards you do not use or have not used in the past six months.
- Avoid easy-to-figure out access and personal ID (PIN) codes.
- Obtain a copy of your credit report yearly and check it for accuracy.

Tax Bills and Reassessment

As you know, property tax bills are being delayed because of reassessment. A court order requires your property to be assessed to market value. This is the last year for this transition.

- Once assessed by the township, your home will receive a \$35,000 deduction from the assessed market value; or 50 percent if the property is valued at less than \$70,000. (However, this deduction is only available if your property qualifies for the homestead credit).

- If you have filed the necessary paperwork with your county, the 20 percent homestead credit will then be subtracted from your tax bill.

When you receive your property tax bill this year, please check to ensure that you received all of the necessary credits which you are due.

For questions about your specific situation, please contact the Hendricks County Assessor's office at (317)745-9406, the Hendricks County Treasurer's office at (317)745-9220, the Putnam County Assessor's office at (765)653-4312 or the Putnam County Treasurer's office at (765)653-4510.

Unclaimed PROPERTY

The Indiana Attorney General's office has compiled a list of names of individuals who have unclaimed property such as:

- Credit balances
- Unpaid wages
- Mutual fund shares
- Insurance proceeds
- Uncashed traveler's checks
- Utility deposits

The Attorney General has a searchable database online at www.indianaunclaimed.com. Or call, toll-free, 1-866-IN-CLAIM.



The Indiana General Assembly gave the green light to two proposals that will make polls more accessible for voters and that bring Indiana in line with the federal Help America Vote Act of 2002.

Senate Enrolled Act 477, which I authored, requires each county election board to conduct training and educational meetings for precinct election officers providing them with information related to making polling places and voting systems accessible to elderly voters.

The act also requires voting systems to meet accessibility requirements no later than Jan. 1, 2006, and establishes standards for accessible facilities and accessible voting systems.

Senate Enrolled Act 268 starts the implementation of the Help America Vote Act in Indiana. After the presidential election of

2000, our entire nation took a second look at how we conduct our elections.

The Indiana Bipartisan Task Force for Election Integrity was established as part of the state's immediate response to election concerns. In 2002, the committee recommended 29 specific improvements to the election process, including better voter registration, use of new technology in gathering votes, and more detailed training for poll workers.

These improvements were a pro-active way of making Indiana's election process even more credible. Now, after two years of scrutiny, Congress has passed the Help America Vote Act to encourage states to do the kinds of activities that we have already started.

The state could receive about \$75 million over the next three years to complete the many reforms that have been set in motion.

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JOBS

employment for residents in counties where the average unemployment rate has consistently been higher than the state's average over the past two years. The legislation aims to assist many counties across the state with their economic development efforts by focusing attention on the rate of joblessness, not the number of jobs lost.

Because economic success in this new century relies heavily on the ability to communicate rapidly, we have extended the I-Light 2 Fiber Optic Network with \$5 million in funding each

Incentives to do business in Indiana will lead to more high-paying jobs for Hoosiers.

year. Access to high-speed data transmission throughout the state is crucial to the success of any rural economic development initiative.

In addition, the budget includes tax credits for the production and use of Indiana grain-based fuels. The measure covers all facets of processing – from soybean crushers to oil refineries to the service stations that will supply the fuel – while growing the demand for agricultural commodities and increasing farmers' profits. Production of grain-based fuels is fiscally responsible and will prove to be an efficient use of our financial resources. The production and use of ethanol and biodiesel takes a step toward reducing dependence upon foreign oil by using a renewable fuel source that is also environmentally friendly.

SENATE ENROLLED ACT 268

This bill tweaks the state statute to properly meet a number of the requirements of the Help America Vote Act:

- Requires the phase-out of lever machines and punch-card voting systems by January 1, 2006.
- Establishes the statewide voter registration system.
- Updates minimum standards for voting systems.
- Permits the Secretary of State to apply for federal funds to make a polling place more accessible.
- Provides that an absentee ballot application from military voters is valid for the next two general elections.

However, we would not have received the funding without having met the federal requirements.

When it comes to election reform, Indiana has an excellent standing compared to that of other states, and we should be proud of the newest additions to our election practices.

Rural economic development includes:

- A \$1.2 million expansion of the value-added grant program, which funds research on innovative uses of agricultural products
- Creation of the Rural Economic Development Administration Fund with \$4.8 million
- \$2.4 million in funding for the statewide Rural Economic Development Council

Adopting a comprehensive economic development plan was one of the most important, most exciting legislative actions of 2003. Although I believe we must spend conservatively in tight financial times, this plan is a sound investment in all Hoosiers.